

THE SIKH RELIGION

AN OUTLINE OF ITS DOCTRINES

BY

TEJA SINGH, M. A.,

PROFESSOR, KHALSA COLLEGE, AMRITSAR

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The aim of life, according to the Sikh Gurus, is not to get salvation or a heavenly abode called Paradise, but to develop the best in us which is God.

‘ If a man loves to see God, what cares he for Salvation or Paradise ? ’ (Guru Nanak's *Tea*)

“Everybody hankers after Salvation Paradise or Elysium, setting their hopes on them every day of their lives. But those who live to see God do not ask for Salvation. The sight itself satisfies their minds completely. (Guru Ram Das in *Kalyan*)

How to see God and to love Him ? The question is taken up by Guru Nanak in his *Japji* :

‘ What shall we offer to Him that we may behold His council-chamber ?

What shall we utter with our lips which may move Him to give us His love ? -

In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the True Name ,

For, your good action
emancipation is free

“We should worship thee
ever and ever the same

The practice of this
and again in the Sikh
little explanation



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The Nature of God or the Name

God is described both as *nirgun*, or absolute, and *sargun*, or personal. Before there was any creation God lived absolutely in Himself, but when He thought of making Himself manifest in creation He became related. In the former case, 'when God was Himself self-created, there was none else, He took counsel and advice with Himself, what He did came to pass. Then there was no heaven, or hell, or the three-regioned world. There was only the Formless One Himself, creation was not then' (*Gujri-ki-Var* of Guru Amar Das). There was then no sin, no virtue, no Veda or any other religious book, no caste, no sex (Guru Nanak's *Maru Solhe*, xv, and Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*, xxi). When God became *sargun* or manifest, He became what is called the *Name*, and in order to realize Himself He made Nature wherein He has His seat and 'is diffused everywhere and in all directions in the form of Love' (Guru Gobind Singh's *Jap*, 80).

In presenting this double phase of the Supreme Being, the Gurus have avoided the pitfalls into which some people have fallen. With them God is not an abstract idea or a moral force, but a personal Being capable of being loved and honoured, and yet He is conceived of as a Being whose presence is diffused all over His creation. He is the common

Father of all, fashioning worlds and supporting them from inside, but He does not take birth. He has no incarnations. He Himself stands for the creative agencies, like the *Maya*, the Word and Brahma, He Himself is Truth, Beauty and the eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness (*Japji*). In a word, the Gurus have combined the Aryan idea of immanence with the Semetic idea of transcendence, without taking away anything from the unity and the personal character of God.

'O' give me give some intelligence of my Beloved
 I am bewildered at the different accounts I have of Him
 O happy wives, my companions, say something of Him
 Some say that He is altogether outside the world,
 others that He is altogether contained in it
 His colour is not seen, His features cannot be made out,
 O happy wives, tell me truly—
 'He lives in everything, He dwells in every heart,
 Yet He is not blended with anything, He is separate''
 'Why dost thou go to the forest in search of God'
 He lives in all, is yet ever distinct. He abides with thee too
 As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror,
 So does God dwell inside everything, seek Him therefore in the
 heart'' †

People who come with preconceived notions to study Sikhism often blunder in offering its interpretation. Those who are conversant with the eastern thought fix upon those passages which refer to the thoughts of immanence and conclude that Sikhism is nothing but an echo of Hinduism, while those who

* *Jaisri* of Guru Arjan. † *Dhanasri* of Guru Teg Bahadur.

are imbued with the Mohammedan or Christian thought take hold of transcendental passages and identify Sikhism with Islam or Christianity. Others who know both will see here no system, nothing particular, nothing but confusion

If, however, we were to study Sikhism as a new organic growth evolved from the existing systems of thought to meet the needs of a newly evolving humanity, we would find no difficulty in recognizing Sikhism as a distinct system of thought.

Take, for instance, Guru Nanak's *Asa-di-Var*, which in its preliminary stanzas lays down the fundamentals of Sikh belief about God. It is a trenchant clear-cut monotheism—God is called 'the in-dweller of Nature,' and is described as filling all things 'by an art that is artless' (xi. 1—2). He is not an impotent mechanic fashioning pre-existing matter into the universe. He does not exclude matter, but includes and transcends it. The universe too is not an illusion—Being rooted in God who is real, it is a reality; not a reality final and abiding, but a reality on account of God's presence in it (ii. 1). His Will is above Nature as well as working within it, and in spite of its immanence it acts not as an arbitrary force but as a personal presence working 'most intelligently' (iii -2). The first thing about God is that He is indivisibly one, above every other being,

however highly conceived, such as Vishnu, Brahma, or Shiva (i), or as Rama and Krishna (iv. 2). The second thing is that He is the highest moral being (ii. 2), who has inscribed all men with His Name or moral presence (ii). He is not a God belonging to any particular people, Muslim or Hindu, but is 'the dispenser of life universal' (vi). The ways to realize Him are not many, but only one (xii. 3), and that way is not knowledge, formalism (xiv.2., xv. 1-4), or what are received as meritorious actions which establish a claim to reward (viii. 2), but love (xiii. 2) and faith (xiv. 2), the aim being to obtain the grace of God (iv. 2, v. 2., viii. 2., xiii. 1). The only way of worshipping Him is to sing His praises (vi. 1., vii., ix, xii. 2, xix. 2, xxii. 3) and to meditate on His Name * (ii, viii. 1, ix. 2, xvi. 1)

Uplift of Man Based on Character

This life of praise is not to be of idle mysticism, but of active service done in the midst of wordly relations "There can be no worship without good

* 'Name' is a term, like *logos* in Greek, bearing various meanings. Sometimes it is used for God Himself, as in *Sukhmani*, xvi. 5. "The Name sustains the animal life, the Name supports the parts and the whole of the universe" It is described as being 'immortal,' 'immaculate,' 'in-dweller of all creation,' and is to be sung, uttered, thought upon, served and worshipped. In most cases it means the revelation of God as found in the sacred Word.

actions.”* These actions, however, are not to be formal deeds of so-called merit, but should be inspired by an intense desire to please God and to serve fellow-men

“Without pleasing God all actions are worthless

Repetition of mantras, austerities, set ways of living, or deeds of merit leave us destitute even before our journey ends

You won't get even half a copper for your fasts and special programmes of life

These things, O brother, won't do there for, the requirements of that way are quite different

You won't get a place there for all your bathing and wandering in different places

These means are useless they cannot satisfy the conditions of that world.

Are you a reciter of all the four Vedas? There is no room for you there

With all your correct reading, if you don't understand one thing that matters, you only bother yourself

I say, Nanak, if you *exert* yourself in action, you will be saved
Serve your God and remember Him, leaving all your pride of self”†

The Gurus laid the foundation of man's uplift, not on such short-cuts as mantras, miracles or mysteries but on man's own humanity, his own character; as it is character alone,—the character already formed—which helps us in moral crises. Life is like a cavalry march. The officer of a cavalry on march has to decide very quickly when to turn his men to the right or left. He cannot wait

*Jappi. † Gauri Mala of Guru Arjan

until his men are actually on the brink of a *nulla* or *khud*. He must decide long before that. In the same way, when face to face with an evil, we have to decide quickly. Temptations allow us no time to think. They always come suddenly. When offered a bribe or an insult, we have to decide at once what course of action we are going to take. We cannot *then* consult a religious book or a moral guide. We must decide on the impulse. And this can be done only if virtue has so entered into our disposition that we are habitually drawn towards it, and evil has got no attraction for us. Without securing virtue sufficiently in character, even some of the so-called great men have been known to fall an easy prey to temptation. It was for this reason that for the formation of character the Gurus did not think it sufficient to lay down rules of conduct in a book ; they also thought it necessary to take in hand a whole people for a continuous course of schooling in wisdom and experience, spread over many generations, before they could be sure that the people thus trained had acquired a character of their own. This is the reason why in Sikhism there have been ten founders, instead of only one.

Before the Sikh Gurus, the leaders of thought had fixed certain grades of salvation, according to the different capacities of men, whom they divided into high and low castes. The development of

character resulting from this was one-sided. Certain people, belonging to the favoured classes, got developed in them a few good qualities to a very high degree, while others left to themselves got degenerate. It was as if a gardener, neglecting to look after all the different kinds of plants entrusted to him were to bestow all his care on a few chosen ones, which were in bloom, so that he might be able to supply a few flowers every day for his master's table. The Gurus did not want to have such a lop-sided growth. They wanted to give opportunities of highest development to all the classes of people

"There are lowest men among the low castes

Nanak, I shall go with them What have I got to do with the great "

God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly "

"It is mere nonsense to observe caste and to feel proud over grand names ""

Some work had already been done in this line. The Bhagats or reformers in the Middle Ages had tried to abolish the distinction between the high class Hindus and the so-called untouchables, by taking into their fold such men as barbers, weavers, shoemakers, etc. But the snake of untouchability still

**Sri Rag of Guru Nanak. See also Guru Arjan's Jaisri-ki-Var, 111., and Guru Amar Das's Bhairo.*

remained unscotched, because the privilege of equality was not extended to men as men, but to those individuals only who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir, a weaver and Ravidas, a shoemaker, were honoured by kings and high-caste men, but the same privilege was not extended to other weavers and shoemakers, who were still held as untouchables. Ravidas took pride in the fact that the love of God had so lifted him out of his caste that even "the superior sort of Brahmins came to bow before him," while the other members of his caste, who were working as shoemakers in the suburbs of Benares, were not so honoured.*

The Sikh Gurus made this improvement on the previous idea that they declared the whole humanity to be one, and that a man was to be honoured, not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed, but because he was a man, an emanation from God, whom God had given the same senses and the same soul as to other men:—

"Recognize all human nature as one "

"All men are the same, although they appear different under different influences

The bright and the dark, the ugly and the beautiful, the Hindus and the muslims, have developed themselves according to the fashions of different countries.

*Ravidas in *Rag Mala*.

All have the same eyes, the same ears, the same body and the same build—a compound of the same four elements **

Such a teaching could not tolerate any ideas of caste or untouchability. Man rose in the estimation of man. Even those who had been considering themselves as the dregs of society, and whose whole generations had lived as grovelling slaves of the so-called higher classes, came to be fired with a new hope and courage to lift themselves as equals of the best of humanity.

Women too received their due "How can they be called inferior," says Guru Nanak, "when they give birth to kings and prophets?"† Women as well as men share in the grace of God and are equally responsible for their actions to Him.‡ Guru Hargobind called woman 'the conscience of man' Sati was condemned by the Sikh Gurus long before any notice was taken of it by Akbar. §

The spirit of man was raised with a belief that he was not a helpless creature in the hands of a Being of an arbitrary will, but was a responsible being endowed with a will of his own, with which he could do much to mould his destiny. Man does not start his life with a blank character. He has already existed before he is born. He inherits his own past

* *Akal Ustat* of Guru Gobind Singh.

† *Asa-di-Var*, xix

‡ See Guru Amar Das's *Var Sula*, vi

as well as that of his family and race. All this goes to the making of his being and has a share in the moulding of his nature. But this is not all. He is given a will with which he can modify the inherited and acquired tendencies of his past and determine his coming conduct. If this were not so, he would not be responsible for his actions. This will, again, is not left helpless or isolated; but if through the Guru's Word it be attuned to the Supreme Will, it acquires a force with which he can transcend all his past and acquire a new character.

This question of human will as related to the Divine Will is an intricate one and requires a little elucidation.

According to Sikhism, the ultimate source of all that is in us is God alone. Without Him there is no strength in us. Nobody, not even the evil man, can say that he can do anything independent of God. Everything moves within the Providential domain.

Thou art a river in which all beings move

There is none but Thee around them

All living things are playing within Thee *

The fish may run against the current of the river or along with it, just as it likes, but it cannot escape the river itself. Similarly man may run counter to what is received as good or moral, but he can never escape from the pale of God's Will.†

*Guru Ram Das in *Asa*. † *Jagjit*, 11

Then who is responsible for his actions? Man himself. We learn from the first *shlok* of Asa-di-Var's 7th *pauri* that man is given free will, which leads him to do good or evil actions, to think good or evil thoughts, and to go in consequence to Heaven or Hell.

'Governed by his free will he laughs or weeps ,
Of his free will he begrimes or washes him-self ,
Of his free will he degrades himself from the order of human beings ,
Of his free will he befools himself or becomes wise ''

In the next *shlok* we read

''Self assertion gives man his individuality and leads him to action

It also ties him down to the world and sends him on a round of births and deaths

Wherefrom comes this assertion of self ? How shall it leave us ?

It comes to man from the Will of God and determines his conduct according to his antecedents

It is a great disease , but its remedy also lies within itself

When God sends grace to man he begins to obey the call of the Guru

Nanak says 'Hear ye all, this is the way to cure the disease '

The source of evil is not Satan or Ahrman, or any other external agency. It is our own sense of Ego placed by God in us. It may prove a boon or a curse to us, according as we subject ourselves to God's Will or not. It is the overweening sense of self that grows as a barrier between God and man and keeps him wandering from sin to sin—

The bride and the bridegroom live together, with a partition of Ego between them '*

The infinite is within us, 'engraved in our being,' like a cypher which is gradually unfolding its meaning as we listen to the voice of the Teacher. It is like the light of the sun ever present, but shut out of our sight by the cloud of ignorance and selfishness. We sin as long as this light remains unmanifested and we believe in our self as everything to us.

Regeneration comes when, at the call of Grace, we begin to subject our tiny self to the highest Self, that is God, and our own will is gradually attuned to His Supreme Will, until we feel and move just as He wishes us to feel and move.

Really the problem of good and evil is the problem of Union and Disunion† with God. All things are strung on God's Will, and man among them. As long as man is conscious of this, he lives and moves in union with Him. But gradually led away by the overweening sense of self he cuts himself from that unity and begins to wander in moral isolation. It is, however, so designed in the case of man that whenever he wishes he can come back to the bosom of his Father and God and resume his position there. Guru Nanak says in *Maru* :

"By the force of Union we meet God and enjoy Him even with this body ,

*Guru Ram Das in *Malar*. †Jagjit, xxix

And by the force of Disunion we break away from Him
But, Nanak, it is possible to be united again "

When we come into this world, we begin our life with a certain capital. We inherit our body from our parents, and there are divine things in us, as 'the spirit and the progressive tendencies,' which serve as forces of union and keep us united with God. But there are also evil tendencies in us inherited from our past lives which serve as forces of Disunion and draw us away from Him towards moral death. Cf. Guru Nanak in *Maru* :

"Man earns his body from the union of his mother and father,
And the Creator inscribes his being with the gifts of the spirit
and the progressive tendencies
But led away by Delusion he forgets himself.

This teaching about the freedom of will and 'the progressive tendencies' raises the spirit of man and gives him a new hope and courage. But that is not enough to enable him to resist evil and to persist in positive virtue. The temptation of evil is so strong and the human powers for resisting it,—in spite of the inherent progressive tendencies,—are so weak that it is practically impossible for him to fulfil that standard of virtue which is expected of him. It was this consciousness of human weakness which made Farid say :

"The Bride is so weak in herself, the Master so stern in His commands "

That is, man is endowed with such weak faculties that

he stumbles at each step, and yet it is expected of him that—

“He should always speak the truth, and never tell lies ”*

“He should beware even of an unconscious sin ”†

“He should not step on the bed of another’s wife even in dream ”‡

These commands cannot be fulfilled simply with the strength of knowledge and inherited tendencies. They will not go far even in resisting evil. The higher ideal of leading a life of positive virtue and sacrifice is absolutely impossible with such a weak equipment. Then what is to be done?

The prophets of the world have given many solutions of this problem. Some get round the difficulty by supposing that there is no evil. It is only a whim or false scare produced by our ignorance. They believe in the efficacy of knowledge. Others believe in the efficacy of Austerities, still others in Alms given in profusion to overwhelm the enormity of sin. There are, again, a higher sort of teachers who inculcate the love of some great man as a saviour. What was the solution offered by the Sikh Gurus?

They saw that, although it was difficult for a man to resist evil and to do good with his own powers, yet if he were primed with another personality possessing dynamic powers he could acquire a transcendental capacity for the purpose. This personality was to be the Guru’s.

*Farid †Guru Teg Bahadur

‡Guru Gobind Singh

The Guru in Sikhism

The way of religion, as shown by Sikhism, is not a set of views or doctrines, but a way of life lived according to a definite *model*. It is based, not on rules or laws, but upon discipleship. In the career of the disciple the personality of the Guru is all along operative, commanding his whole being and shaping his life to its diviner issues. Without such a personality there would be no cohesion, no direction in the moral forces of society, and in spite of a thousand kinds of knowledge 'there would still be utter darkness' * There would be no force to connect men with men and them with God. Everybody would exist for himself in moral isolation, 'like spurious sesames left desolate in the field' 'with a hundred masters to own them.' * It is the Guru who removes the barriers of caste and position set up by men among themselves and gathering them all unto himself unites them with God †. In this way foundations are laid of a society of the purified who as an organized force strive for the good of the whole mankind.

Such a creative personality must be perfect,

* *Asa-di-Var*, i.

† "Nanak, the true Guru must be such as to unite all men."—

Sri Rag, I.

because 'men take after whom they serve.'* If the ideal person is imperfect, the society and its individuals following him will also get imperfect development. But 'those who serve the saved ones will be saved.'†

The Sikh Gurus were perfect, and are described as such in the Sikh Scriptures. Guru Nanak himself says in *Sri Rag*: "Everybody else is subject to error; only the Guru and God are without error." And Guru Arjan says in *Bhairon* : "Whoever is seen is defective; without any defect is my true Guru, the Yogi." The state of perfection attained by the Gurus is lucidly described in the eighth and the eighteenth octaves of Guru Arjan's *Sukhmani*. The same Guru says in *Asa*:

God does not die, nor do I fear death.
He does not perish, nor do I grieve
He is not poor, nor do I have hunger.
He has no pain, nor have I any trouble.
There is no destroyer but God.
Who is my life and who gives me life.
He has no bond, nor have I got any.
He has no entanglement, nor have I any care.
As He is stainless, so am I free from stain.
As He is happy, so am I always rejoicing.
He has no anxiety, nor have I any concern.
As He is not defiled, so am I not polluted.
As He has no craving, so do I covet nothing.

*Guru Amar Das in *Vai Bilagra*. †*Majh*, III.

He is pure and I too suit Him in this.
I am nothing He alone is everything
All around is the same He
Nanak, the Guru has destroyed all my superstition and defects.
And I have become uniformly one with Him

The Guru is sinless. In order, however, to be really effective in saving man, he must not be above man's capacity to imitate, as he would be if he were a supernatural being. His humanity must be real and not feigned. He should have a nature subject to the same laws as operate in the ordinary human nature, and should have attained his perfection through the same Grace as is available to all men and through perfect obedience to God's Will. The Sikh Gurus had fought with sin and had overcome it. Some of them had lived for a long time in error, until Grace touched them and they were perfected through a constant discipline of knowledge, love and experience in the association of their Gurus. When they had been completely attuned to the Will divine and were sanctified as Gurus, there remained no defect in them and they became perfect and holy. Thereafter sins did come to tempt them, but they never gave way and were always able to overcome them. It is only thus that they became perfect exemplars of men and transformed those who came under their influence to veritable angelic beings.

The Guru in the Sikh

This transformation comes not only through close association with the Guru, which is found in many other religions, but through the belief that the Sikh incorporates the Guru. He fills himself with the Guru, and then feels himself linked up with an inexhaustible source of power. A Sikh, a pure-hearted Sikh, who follows the teachings of his Guru, is a great power in himself, but when such a Sikh gets into himself the dynamic personality of such a perfect exemplar as Guru Gobind Singh, his powers acquire an infinite reach and he becomes a super-man. He is called "Khalsa," the personification of the Guru himself. "The Khalsa," says the Guru, "is my other self, in him I live and have my being." A single Sikh, a mere believer, is only one, but the equation changes when he takes Guru Gobind Singh into his embrace. He becomes equal to 'one lakh and a quarter,' in the Sikh parlance. This change occurs not only in his physical fitness, but also in his mental and spiritual outlook. His nature is so reinforced in every way that although hundreds may fall round him, he will resist to the last and never give way. Wherever he stands, he will stand as 'a garrison of the Lord of Hosts,' a host in himself—a host of one lakh and a quarter. He will keep the Guru's flag always flying. Whenever

tempted, he will ask himself, "Can I lower the flag of Guru Gobind Singh? Can I desert it? I, as Budh Singh or Kahan Singh, can fall; but can Guru Gobind Singh in me fall? No, never." This feeling of incorporation with the Guru makes the Sikh strong beyond his ordinary powers, and in times of emergency comes to his rescue long before he can remember anything relevant to the occasion recorded in history or scripture. Bhai Joga Singh's case is just in point. He was a devoted Sikh of Guru Gobind Singh, and had received baptism from the hands of the Guru himself. He was so loyal that when he received an urgent call from the Guru to proceed to Anandpur, he hastened from Peshawar without a moment's delay, not waiting even to see his own marriage through. And yet in a moment of weakness, this paragon of Sikh purity was going to fall, fall at the door of a public woman of Hoshiarpur. Who saved him in that emergency? It was the vision of Guru Gobind Singh, re-establishing the personal contact by pointing out the signs of personation worn on his body, and reminding him that he was carven in the Guru's own image.

The Guru in the Panth

So far we have considered what the Guru does for the Sikhs as individuals. We have seen how he intensifies their character and increases their power

thousandfold by filling their personalities with his own. In order to increase this power immensely more, the Guru made another arrangement. He organized them into *Sangats* or Holy Assemblies, and put his personality again into them. This led to a very remarkable development in the institution of Guruship, and no description of Guruship will be complete without an account of this development.

The Sikh idea of religion, as we have seen, was something more practical than merely mystic. It was to consist of the practice of *Nam* and *Sewa*. To practise *Nam* means to practise the presence of God by keeping Him ever in our minds by singing His praises or dwelling on His excellences. This is to be done not only when alone in solitude, but also in public, where worship of the Name is made more impressive by being organized in the form of congregational recitations or singing. The other element is *Sewa* or Service. The idea of service is that it should be not only liberal, but also efficient and economical; that is, it should do the greatest good with the least possible means. It should not be wasteful. We do not set up a sledge-hammer to crack a nut, or send a whole army to collect revenue. We have to be economical in our efforts, however charitable they may be. For this purpose

we have to organize our means. In every work of practical nature, in which more than one person is engaged, it is necessary to resort to organization. As religion too—especially a religion like Sikhism whose aim is to serve mankind—belongs to the same category, it requires organization of its followers as an essential condition of its success. It may not be necessary in the case of an individualistic religion, wherein the highest aim is to vacate the mind of all desires, or to dream away the whole life in jungles or mountains, but where religion consists in realizing God mainly through service done within the world, where men have constantly to deal with men to promote each other's good, it is impossible to do without organization.

Guru Nanak had therefore begun with two things in his religious work: the holy Word and the organized Fellowship.* This organized fellowship is called *Sangat*. The idea of *Sangat* or holy Fellowship led to the establishment of local assemblies led by authorised leaders, called *Masands*. Every Sikh was supposed to be a member of one or other of such organizations. The Guru was the central unifying personality and, in spite of changes in succession, was held to be one and the

*Bhai Gurdas Var 1. 42-43.

same as his predecessors.* The love existing between the Guru and the Sikhs was more intense than has ever existed between the most romantic lovers of the world. But homage paid to the Guru was made impersonal by creating a mystic unity between the Sikh and the Guru on the one hand and the Guru and the Word on the other. † Greatest respect began to be paid to the incor-

*In the Coronation Ode of Satta and Balwand the following verses occur —

“Guru Nanak proclaimed the accession of Lehna as a reward for service. He had the same light, the same method, the Master merely changed his body.”

‘The wise being Guru Nanak descended in the form of Amari Das.’ ‘Thou Ram Das, art Nanak, thou art Lehna, thou art Amari Das.’ The human race comes and goes, but thou, O Arjan, art ever new and whole.”

Mohsin Fani, who wrote in the time of the Sixth Guru, says about the Sikhs in the *Dabistan* — Then belief is that all the Gurus are identical with Nanak.”

Guru Gobind Singh in his *Vachitra Natak* says about the Gurus — “All take them as different from one another, very few recognize them as one in spirit. But only those realize perfection who do recognize them as one.”

See also the *Sadd* of Sundar, the *saayyas* at the end of Guru Granth Sahib, and Bhai Gurdas's *Vais* i. 45-48, iii 12, ix 1 xxiv 5-25, xxvi 31 and 34.

The Gurus always signed themselves as *Nanak*.

† ‘The Guru lives within his Sikhs, and is pleased with whatever they like.’—*Gauri-ki-Pai*, IV. “The Guru is Sikh and the Sikh who practises the Guru's word is at one with the Guru.”—*Ara Chhant*, IV. See also Bhai Gurdas, *Vais* iii 11, and ix 16. “The Guru is the Word, and the Word is Guru.”—*Kama IV*.

porated Word, even the Guru choosing for himself a seat lower than that of the Scripture. The only form of worship was the meditation on and the singing of the Word.* The Sikh assemblies also acquired great sanctity, owing to the belief that the spirit of the Guru lived and moved among them. They began to assume higher and higher authority, until collectively the whole body, called the *Panth*, came to be regarded as an embodiment of the Guru. Guru Gobind Singh himself received baptism from the Sikhs initiated by himself. After him the Sikhs ceased to have any personal Guru. If we read the Sikh history aright, the Sikh community would appear as an organized unit to have undergone a course of discipline in the hands of ten Gurus, until its character was fully developed and the Guru merged his personality in the body of the nation thus reared. The Guru, as mentioned above, worked with two things: the personal association and the Word. Now after the death of Guru Gobind Singh the personality and the Word were separated. The

**Asa-di-Var*, vi 1. "In this world the best practice is of the Word."—*Parbhati*, I "My yoga is practised by singing Thy hymns"—*Asa*, V Sujan Rai of Batala writing about Sikhs in 1697 says in his *Khulasat-ul-Twarikh* "The only way of worship with them is that they read the hymns composed by their Gurus and sing them sweetly in accompaniment with musical instruments." In the Golden Temple, Amritsar, up to this time nothing but continuous singing of hymns days and night by relays of singers is allowed.

Panth was invested with the personality of the Guru, and the incorporated Word became the *Gyan* Guru. That is, in simple words, the Khalsa Panth was to be the Guru in future, not in supersession of the previous Gurus, but as authorised to work in their name; and it was invariably to guide itself by the teachings of the Gurus as found in the Holy Granth. So that the Sikhs came to name Guru Nanak and the Guru Panth in the same breath.

Amrit or baptism was made the basis of this organization. There was no room left for any wavering on the broder-line. All who wanted to serve humanity through Sikhism must join it seriously as regular members, and receive its baptism as the initial step. All must have the same creed, which should be well-defined and should not be confused with the beliefs and practices of the neighbouring religions. The Guru ordered that—

The Khalsa should be distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim.*

“He who keeps aight the unquenchable torch of truth, and never swerves from the thought of one God ;

He who has full love and confidence in God, and does not put his faith, even by mistake, in fasting or the graves of Muslim saints, Hindu crematoriums, or Jogis' places of sepulchre, He who only recognizes the one God and no pilgrimages, alms, non-destruction of life, penances, or austerities;

* *Rahatnama* of Chaupa Singh.

And in whose heart the light of the Perfect One shines,—he is to be recognized as a pure member of the Khalsa **

Such a Khalsa was to embody in himself the highest ideal of manhood, as described by Guru Gobind Singh in his unpublished book, called *Sarb Loh*. Although the Khalsa was designed by the Guru himself, yet the Guru was so charmed by the look of his own creation that he saluted it, in the book, as his own ideal and master. The Khalsa was thought fit enough to administer baptism of the new order to the Guru, and was consecrated as the Guru incarnate. As a sign that the Guru had placed himself eternally in his Sikhs, it was declared by him that—

“If anybody wishes to see me, let him go to an assembly of Sikhs, and approach them with faith and reverence, he will surely see me amongst them ”†

In the ranks of the Khalsa, all were equal, the lowest with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes. Women were to be baptized in the same way as men and were to enjoy the same rights. The “*Sarbat Khalsa*,” or the whole people, met once at the Akal Takh Amritsar, the highest seat of Panthic authority, on the occasion of Dewali or Baisakhi, and felt that they were one. All questions, affecting the welfare of the community, were referred to the *Sangats*,

**Swayyas of Guru Gobind Singh.*

†*Prem Sumarag.*

which would decide them in the form of resolutions called *Gurmattas*. A *Gurmatta* duly passed was supposed to have received the sanction of the Guru, and any attempt made afterwards to contravene it was taken as a sacrilegious act.

Forms and Ceremonies

This institution of the Khalsa entails a certain additional disciplinary outfit in the shape of baptismal forms and vows, which are often misunderstood. It is true that if religion were only a matter of individual concern, there would be no need of forms and ceremonies. But religion, as taught by the Gurus, is a force that not only ennobles individuals but also binds them together to work for nobility in the world. Organization is a means of enlarging the possibility, scope and effectiveness of this work. In order that an organization itself may work effectively, it is necessary that the individuals concerned in it should be able to keep up their attachment to the cause and a sufficient amount of enthusiasm for it. It is, however, a patent fact that men by their nature are so constituted that they cannot keep their feelings equally high-strung for a long time at a stretch. Reaction is inevitable, unless some means are devised to ensure the continuity of exertion. This is where discipline comes in, which

keeps up the spirit of individuals against relaxation in times of trial and maintains their loyalty to the cause even in moments of ebb. This discipline, or what is called *esprit de corps*, is secured by such devices as flags and drills and uniforms in armies, and certain forms and ceremonies in religion. Uniformity is an essential part of them. They create the necessary enthusiasm by appealing to imagination and sentiment, and work for it in moments of depression. They are a real aid to religion, which is essentially a thing of sentiment. Man would not need them if he were only a bundle of intellectual and moral senses; but as he has also got sentiment and imagination, without which the former qualities would be inoperative, he cannot do without articulating his ideas and beliefs in some forms appropriate to sentiment. These forms must not be dead but a living index of his ideal, waking up in him vivid intimations of the personality that governs his religion. They should be related to his inner belief as words are to their meaning, tears to grief, smiles to happiness and a tune to a song. It is true that sometimes words become meaningless, when we no longer heed their sense, or the language to which they belong becomes dead. It is true that sometimes tears and smiles are only cloaks for hypocrisy, and a tune mere meaningless jingle. But there is no

denying the fact that, when their inner meaning is real and we are sincere about it, they do serve as very helpful interpreters. Forms are the art of religion. Like art on Nature, these forms impose certain limitations on the ideal, but at the same time they make the ideal more real and workable for general use.

Sometimes, however, when the forms are determined, not by the necessity of uniformity which is so essential for discipline, but by local or racial causes, they narrow the applicability of the ideal and create division and exclusiveness where they should have helped men to unite. When the spirit in which they had been originally conceived dies out, they become mere handicaps to religion, and the people who use them would be well-advised to abandon them. It was such forms that Guru Nanak asked people to leave. "Burn that custom," he said, "which makes you forget dear God."* But the Sikh forms were not conceived in a spirit of exclusiveness, or as essential to the advancement of individual souls. They were simply appointed to serve as aids to the preservation of the corporate life of the community, and any man who likes to serve humanity through the Sikh Panth can wear them. It is possible for a man to love God and

**Vadhans-ki-Var.*

cultivate his individual soul without adopting these forms; but if he wants to work in a systematic manner, not only for his own advancement but for the good of others as well in the company of Sikhs, he must adopt these disciplinary forms of their organization. The Sikhs, who are the soldiers of Guru Gobind Singh and whose religion is surcharged with his personality, find the uniform worn and ordained by him as a real help in playing their part as units of the Panthic organization. This help comes from the appeal made to sentiment by the process of association and not through any inherent efficacy of the forms themselves. This association is not with places or things, but with an ever-living personality that is itself a symbol of the Highest Personality. As is God, so is the Guru, and as is the Guru, so must be the follower. Wearing a **Knicker** ensuring briskness of movement at times of action and serving as an easy underwear at times of rest, an iron **ring** on his right arm as a sign of sternness and constraint and a **sword** by his side as an instrument of offence and defence and as an emblem of power and dignity,* the Guru presented an impressive picture of a simple but disciplined soldier. He, however, combined in him the saintli-

*"Charity and Kirpan are the symbols of self-respect"—

Pakhuano Charitha, 322.

ness of the old Rishies with the sternness and strength of a knight. Therefore, like his predecessors, he kept **long hair**, which all the world over have always been associated with saintliness. A **comb** was a simple necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These are the forms with which the Sikhs are invested at the time of their baptism, in order to look exactly like their master, as they are to behave exactly like him.

From the history of Sikhs in the past as well as in the present, it is quite evident how effectively these baptismal forms, with the accompanying vows of purity, love and service, have aided them in keeping themselves united and their ideals unsullied even in times of the greatest trial. While keeping the Sikhs associated with their Guru and maintaining his spirit amongst them, they have not produced any narrowing effect on their beliefs or modes of worship. All worship and ceremony, whether in temple or home, whether on birth, marriage or death, consists of nothing else but praying and chanting hymns. Could anything be simpler?

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